

## Editorial

The four articles that appear in this issue are important on three accounts. Firstly, they represent the international flavour of the journal – with papers from Scotland, Canada, the United States and England respectively. Secondly, two of the papers explore an issue that is timely and becoming increasingly important in education circles, namely, the use of on-line group sessions in teaching. Thirdly, the articles in this edition make a strong contribution to the knowledge base that underpins groupwork theory and practice and, as such, make important reading. In addition to these papers, there is a perceptive and engaging personal reflection on the 11th European Groupwork Symposium that took place in York this July, plus two book reviews.

This edition begins with Carol Lewis's personal reflections on the York Groupwork Symposium. For those of you who were unable to attend this symposium, Carol's thoughts on her experience give a rich and insightful account of this event. I agree that this occasion is more than a conference – it is a coming together of like-minded people from different contexts and countries who enjoy 'thinking group' in all its diversity and complexity. As Carol notes, the setting of St. John's College is particularly wonderful for this kind of exploration. However, Carol's article covers other themes and concerns that we feel strongly about as groupworkers, particularly the place held by groupwork within contemporary social work.

The first article is an illuminating paper from Scotland, written by Tim Kelly, Andrew Lowndes and Debbie Tolson, describing a qualitative study examining the stages of group development in relation to on-line group sessions for nurses. The article looks at group development and the 'dominant paradigms' that have emerged over the years. One dominant theory that has remained relatively unchallenged states that groups are not really productive and fully functioning until power and control issues have been resolved. This project tested this paradigm in ways that question some of the theories that underpin the stages of group development – thereby contributing to our knowledge and the ongoing debate in relation

to this difficult subject area.

The second paper is from Canada, and written by a groupwork scholar, Alice Home, and an experienced practitioner, Terri Biggs. This article provides a fascinating account of a pilot groupwork project for the mothers of children with 'invisible disabilities' – in this case Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). This theme is explored from two perspectives: firstly, what constitutes 'evidence' in contemporary social work practice, and the importance of encouraging practitioner research. Secondly, the difficulties – and neglect – faced by the parents of children with 'invisible' disabilities. The paper highlights the success of this work – both for the five mothers who attended the group, and also the advantages reaped by the 'researcher-practitioner team'.

Returning to the subject of on-line learning but remaining in North America, the paper by Joanne Levine addresses a gap in our knowledge about female social work students' e-learning experiences. This study, located in a southeastern university in the United States, involved 45 female Masters level students who, as part of their course, were required to participate in four-weekly, one-hour peer self-help groups. Eleven of these students chose to participate in on-line self-help groups and 34 in face-to-face self-help groups. The study compares students' reactions and suggests that further research is needed, particularly studies that draw on relational theory with regard to women's development and the benefits of on-line learning for women learners.

The paper that I submitted for this edition looks at the knowledge base of groupwork and its importance within social work. It argues that for social work students and groupwork practitioners to be effective in their work, they need to have a sound knowledge base. This paper offers a framework from which to conceptualise this knowledge base, linking this framework to groupwork theory and practice. It highlights the importance of groupwork skills being taught on social work programmes, and how this knowledge can inform not only groupwork practice but other areas of social work, including work with teams, families, communities, networks and organisations, including multiprofessional/interprofessional areas of work.

Two book reviews are also included. The first is a review of the

latest edition of Dominique Moyse Steinberg's text, *The Mutual-Aid Approach to Working with Groups: Helping people help one another* and the second a review of Fiona McDermott's *Inside Group Work: A guide to reflective practice*. Both are important texts within this field and highly recommended.

### **Conference presentations**

I want to revisit the theme of conferences and to raise an issue I believe is important. This year, an unfortunate conference clash meant that I had to leave the York Symposium early to attend the Joint Social Work Education Conference (JSWEC) at Loughborough University. The contrast between the two conferences could not have been more pronounced, but particularly noticeable in the dearth of papers on groupwork at JSWEC. I encountered a similar situation at the European Social Work Conference in Cyprus in May of this year and at the International Social Work Congress in Adelaide in October 2004. I presented a groupwork paper at all three conferences and Carol Cohen, a member of the editorial board from New York, presented a brilliant paper at the Adelaide Congress. In addition, Carol organised a special interest event on groupwork that was attended by twenty-five people from different parts of the world. The point I want to make is that we need to present more papers on groupwork at national and international conferences in order to encourage others to 'think group' and to keep the profile of groupwork high.

On a related point, the new social work degree is now in place but, as I stated in my paper, it is not clear how social work programmes have interpreted the requirements put forward by the General Social Care Council in relation to 'work with groups'. Of particular interest is the extent to which groupwork – as a practice method - is being offered to students and if so, what this teaching covers in terms of its content, teaching format, and duration, and so forth. In order to begin to bridge this gap in our knowledge, Mark Doel and I plan to contact social work programmes over the coming months to try to gain some kind of picture. Also, we know very little about the extent to which groupwork skills are being used in social work practice and in order to address this gap, Carol Lewis and Michael Preston-Shoot hope to undertake a similar review.

### **Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)**

Finally, with the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) looming, we hope that the papers included in this issue will inspire the readers of this journal to put pen to paper. An understanding of groups, groupings and groupwork theory and practice covers a vast subject area – as this edition demonstrates – and we hope that the themes explored in this and previous editions of *Groupwork* will encourage you to explore some of these subject areas. We look forward to hearing from you.

**Pamela Trevithick**  
**Co-Editor**  
**August 2005**